



Department of State

TELEGRAM

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ACTION EA-09

INFO OCT-01 EUR-12 ISO-00 PM-04 NSC-05 SP-02 SS-15 CIAE-00

DODE-00 INR-07 NSAE-00 PA-01 PRS-01 NSCE-00 SSO-00

USIE-00 INRE-00 CAB-02 COME-00 DOTE-00 EB-07 FAA-00

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O P 070515Z JUN 76
FM AMEMBASSY KUALA LUMPUR
TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 3608
INFO AMEMBASSY BANGKOK PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY CANBERRA PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY JAKARTA PRIORITY
AMCONSUL HONG KONG PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY MANILA PRIORITY
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AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY
AMEMBASSY WELLINGTON PRIORITY
CINCPAC PRIORITY

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CINCPAC ALSO FOR POLAD

E.O. 11652: N/A

TAGS: PGOV PINS PFOR MY

SUBJ: SABAH

CHIEF MINISTER AND OTHER VIP'S KILLED IN PLANE CRASH
JUNE 6.

REF: (A) KUALA LUMPUR 2172, (B) KUALA LUMPUR 3194

1. SUMMARY. NEW SABAH CHIEF MINISTER, SEVERAL KEY LIEUTENANTS,
AND OTHER GOVERNMENT FIGURES KILLED IN PLANE
CRASH JUNE 6. DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARRIS SALLEH SWORN

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IN AS CHIEF MINISTER. ALTHOUGH TIMING OF DEATHS OF REFORMIST POLITICIANS LED BERJAYA PARTY PARTISANS TO SUSPECT FOUL PLAY, THERE ARE NO INDICATIONS SUCH WAS CASE. SLIM BERJAYA MAJORITY IN STATE ASSEMBLY TO BE TESTED IN BY-ELECTIONS. IMPACT OF DEATHS, ESPECIALLY OF FUAD, LIKELY FURTHER UNSETTLE COMPLEX POLITICAL SITUATION IN SABAH, WITH ITS CONCOMITTANT SPILL-OVERS INTO RELATIONS WITH PHILIPPINES (OVER AID TO FILIPINO MUSLIM DISSIDENTS) AND WITH FEDERAL GOVERNMENT.
END SUMMARY.

2. SABAH CHIEF MINISTER TUN HAJI MOHAMAD FUAD (FORMERLY KNOWN AS DONALD STEPHENS), SWORN IN ONLY SIX WEEKS AGO AFTER SUCCESS OF HIS BERJAYA PARTY IN STATE ASSEMBLY ELECTIONS, AND A NUMBER OF OTHER DIGNITARIES WERE AMONG 11 PERSONS KILLED IN MID-AFTERNOON CRASH JUNE 6 OF SMALL SABAH FLYING CLUB PLANE NEAR SABAH STATE CAPITAL OF KOTA KINABALU. THE CRAFT, A TWO-ENGINE "NOMAD" OF AUSTRALIAN MANUFACTURE, WAS RETURNING PASSENGERS FROM HIGH LEVEL MEETINGS ON LABUAN ISLAND IN CONNECTION WITH SCHEDULED JUNE 7 SIGNING OF PETROLEUM REVENUE SHARING AGREEMENT BETWEEN SABAH AND FEDERAL GOVERNMENT (SEE REF B) AND MATTERS RELATING TO THE FORTHCOMING THIRD MALAYSIAN FIVE YEAR PLAN. ON LANDING APPROACH, REPORTEDLY DURING DRIZZLE, PLANE SPUN OUT AND CRASHED INTO SEA AT VILLAGE OF SEMBULAN, ABOUT TWO MILES FROM AIRPORT, ACCORDING TO EYEWITNESSES. POLICE AT SCENE REPORTED 10 BODIES, INCLUDING FUAD'S, RECOVERED. AN OFFICIAL GOM INVESTIGATIVE TEAM ALREADY HAS BEEN DISPATCHED TO CRASH SITE. AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION REPORTS AUSTRALIANS HAVE OFFERED A SIMILAR CRASH INVESTIGATION TEAM IN VIEW OF AUSTRALIAN ORIGIN OF CRAFT, AND APPARENTLY OFFER ACCEPTED.

3. VICTIMS, IN ADDITION TO CHIEF MINISTER, WERE:
(A) DATUK SALLEH SULONG, SABAH FINANCE MINISTER;
(B) DATUK PETER MOJUNTIN, SABAH MINISTER OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT; (C) ENCIK CHONG THIEN YUN, SABAH MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND WORKS; (D) ENCIK DARIUS BINION, ASSISTANT MINISTER, CHIEF MINISTER'S OFFICE; (E) DATUK WAHID PETER ANDU, PERMANENT SECRETARY, SABAH FINANCE MINISTRY; (F) DR. SYED HUSSEIN WAFI, DIRECTOR, SABAH ECONOMIC PLANNING UNIT; (G) HAJI JOHARI FUAD, FUAD'S SON; (H) ENCIK

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ISHAK ATAN, PERSONAL ASSISTANT TO TENGKU RAZALEIGH HAMZAH (FEDERAL FINANCE MINISTER AND CHAIRMAN OF THE NATIONAL OIL CORPORATION, PETRONAS); (I) FUAD'S BODYGUARD; AND (J) THE SABAH FLYING CLUB PILOT. ETHNICALLY, OF THE FIVE BERJAYA ASSEMBLYMEN KILLED, THREE WERE KADAZAN (FUAD, MOJUNTIN, SALLEH SULONG), ONE CHINESE (CHONG), AND A MALAY (BINION).

4. DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER DATUK HARRIS SALLEH WAS ESCORTING TENGKU RAZALEIGH AND VISITING SARAWAK CHIEF MINISTER RAHMAN YAKUB ON VISIT TO KUDAT, SABAH, AT TIME OF CRASH, ALTHOUGH ALL HAD BEEN TOGETHER WITH FUAD ON LABUAN BEFOREHAND. ACCORDING TO ONE LOCAL NEWSMAN, FUAD AT ONE POINT HAD PLANNED TO TRAVEL TO KUDAT WITH VISITORS, BUT HAD CHANGED MIND AND RETURNED TO KOTA KINABALU INSTEAD.

5. FOLLOWING CRASH, H (SABAH'S SIXTH). HARRIS WAS ALSO NAMED AS ACTING PRESIDENT OF THE BERJAYA PARTY. HARRIS IS A MUSLIM OF MIXED KADAZAN AND INDIAN BLOOD AND WAS BORN NOV 4, 1930, IN LABUAN, BRITISH NORTH BORNEO. HE WORKED AS A CIVIL SERVANT FROM 1950 TO 1963, WHEN HE RESIGNED TO ENTER SABAH POLITICS. AN EARLY HARD-LINE MUSLIM CHAUVINIST AND SUPPORTER OF FORMER SABAH CHIEF MINISTER TUN MUSTAPHA, HARRIS RESIGNED FROM MUSTAPHA'S UNITED SABAH NATIONAL ORGANIZATION (USNO) IN JULY, 1975, TO HELP FORM THE NEW BERJAYA PARTY AS ITS FIRST PRESIDENT. HE GAVE UP THE BERJAYA PRESIDENCY TO TUN FUAD WHEN THE LATTER JOINED THE PARTY SOON AFTER ITS FORMATION. IN THE DECEMBER 1975 BY-ELECTION FOR HIS OLD STATE ASSEMBLY SEAT IN LABUAN, HARRIS WAS DEFEATED BY THE USNO CANDIDATE BUT IN THE APRIL 1976 ELECTION HE WON A SEAT IN THE TENOM CONSTITUENCY BY AN OVERWHELMING MARGIN. HE WAS MINISTER OF RURAL DEVELOPMENT AS WELL AS DEPUTY CHIEF MINISTER IN THE FUAD GOVERNMENT.

6. FUNERAL SERVICES T
AFTERNOON JUNE 7. GOM HAS ORDERED ALL MALAYSIAN FLAGS TO BE FLOWN AT HALF STAFF UNTIL NIGHTFALL.

7. DEATH OF THE FIVE BERJAYA ASSEMBLY MEMBERS REDUCED BERJAYA MAJORITY FROM 34 OF 54 SEATS IN ASSEMBLY TO 29

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(INCLUDING 6 APPOINTED MEMBERS). BERJAYA HOWEVER NOW CONTROLS BUT 23 OF THE 28 ELECTIVE SEATS; THE FIVE VACANCIES, AS WE UNDERSTAND IT, ARE REQUIRED TO BE FILLED VIA BY-ELECTIONS WITHIN THREE MONTHS. VICTORY BY OPPOSITION USNO PARTY IN THESE CONTESTS, OR DEFECTION BY BERJAYA MEMBERS, COULD THREATEN BERJAYA'S SLIM MAJORITY.

8. COMMENT: LOSS OF FUAD AND HIS LIEUTENANTS IS MAJOR BLOW TO BERJAYA AS WELL AS SABAH ITSELF, AS THESE INDIVIDUALS WERE EXPERIENCED POLITICIANS AND ADMINISTRATORS. FUAD, 56, SERVED PREVIOUSLY (IN THE 1960'S) AS CHIEF MINISTER AND SUBSEQUENTLY HAD SERVED AS MALAYSIAN HIGH COMMISSIONER TO AUSTRALIA AND LATER IN FIGUREHEAD CAPACITY AS SABAH HEAD OF SPCPOF (YANG DIPERTUA NEGARA). MOJUNTIN, 36, WAS A WELL-REGARDED POLITICAL ACTIVIST AND RECIPIENT OF AN IVP TRAVEL GRANT TO U.S. IN 1968. SALLEH SULING, 37, ALSO WAS A KEY BERJAYA FIGURE, AND SEVERAL-TIME IVP NOMINEE. IMMEDIATE REACTION OF SOME BERJAYA SUPPORTERS, ON LEARNING OF DEATHS, WAS TO SUSPECT FOUL PLAY, IN VIEW OF ANIMOSITY BETWEEN FORMER SABAH STRONGMAN TUN MUSTAPHA'S USNO PARTY (WHO LOST THEIR MAJORITY IN THE APRIL STATE ELECTIONS) AND BERJAYA. AT THIS POINT, HOWEVER, DESPITE PERCULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES OF TIMING OF DEATHS OF REFORMIST FIGURES IN OFFICE BUT SIX WEEKS AFTER ASSUMING OFFICE, THERE ARE NO RPT NO INDICATIONS OF SABOTAGE. EXPERIENCED PILOT AT AUSTRALIAN HIGH COMMISSION INDICATED CRASH SMACKS OF PILOT ERROR INVOLVING STALL ON LOW ALTITUDE LANDING APPROACH.

9. IN ANY CASE, DEATHS, ESPECIALLY OF FUAD, LIKELY TO PROMPT TUN MUSTAPHA AND USNO TO RALLY AND ATTEMPT TO REASSERT INFLUENCE TO REGAIN LOST SEATS AND RESTORE PRESTIGE. EFFECT OF FUAD'S DEATH ON BERJAYA PARTY DISCIPLINE AND POSSIBILITY OF CROSS-OVERS TO USNO CREATE FURTHER AREA OF UNCERTAINTY. SABAH POLITICS ALONE, ASIDE FROM FEDERAL-STATIASPECTS, IS COMPLICATED MIX OF ETHNO-RELIGIOUS CONSIDERATIONS, AND, FOR SOME, INVOLVEMENT WITH FILIPINO MUSLIM DISSIDENTS. WHEREAS A FEW DAYS AGO KUALA LUMPUR SEEMED TO HAVE PRETTY WELL NEUTRALIZED THE FREE WHEELING MUSTAPHA, THEREBY REMOVING AN IRRITANT TO THE PHILIPPINES AS WELL AS ITSELF, AND LOOKING FORWARD TO BRINGING BOTH BERJAYA AND USNO INTO THE NATIONAL FRONT FOLD, AS WELL AS FINALLY

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SIGNING STATE-FEDERAL PETROLEUM AGREEMENT, SITUATION IS NOW
VERY MUCH UP IN AIR. IN THIS REGARD RESPONSE OF FEDERAL
GOVERNMENT IN NEXT FEW WEEKS IN SECURITY, POLITICAL AND
ECONOMIC ARENAS WILL BE OF CONSIDERABLE INTEREST.
UNDERHILL

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